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SUBJECT: EAP A/S HILL MEETS SENIOR COMMUNIST PARTY OFFICIAL
IN HANOI

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11. (SBU) Summary: On January 13, EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill met with Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) External Relations Commission Director Nguyen Van Son to discuss the U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship and regional issues of mutual interest. In addition to upcoming high-level visits to Vietnam, A/S Hill also raised Vietnam's WTO aspirations and stressed the importance of a quick conclusion to the next round of negotiations. Director Son outlined the consensus in the current CPV Plenum on continued economic and political reform through the expansion of democracy and the market mechanism. A/S Hill also discussed relations with China, North Korea and Cambodia. Son emphasized cooperation with China, but had little to offer regarding North Korea except to affirm the GVN's continued support for a unified and non-nuclear Korea. He also noted the importance of stability to Cambodian officials. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On January 13, EAP Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill met with CPV External Affairs Commission Director Nguyen Van Son, accompanied by the Ambassador. Hill noted that since Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's June 2005 visit, the USG has thought a great deal about the bilateral relationship. He predicted that 2006 should be a historic year as Vietnam hosts APEC and hopefully celebrates WTO accession. The United States wants Vietnam to succeed and will continue to work to build a strong and lasting relationship. For the United States, Vietnam is not just an economy, but also has a strong political role to play in the region. Son responded that the GVN appreciates the role and position of the United States and attaches importance to the beneficial, bilateral relationship. He agreed that 2005 had many positive developments, including the PM's trip to Washington, and noted that the GVN "had carried out their part of the agreements reached in the summit."

APEC and Upcoming Visits

13. (SBU) Son predicted that 2006 will see more positive developments between the United States and Vietnam and stated that the GVN is looking forward to visits by President Bush and Secretary Rice during APEC. He added his personal hope that the Secretary would visit Vietnam before APEC. Son also conveyed the GVN's request for U.S. assistance in hosting APEC and observed that the President's visit will contribute greatly to APEC's success. A/S Hill said that the Secretary is very interested in visiting Vietnam since her good discussion with Foreign Minister

Nguyen Dzy Nien at the Busan APEC Summit. He further noted that the President enjoyed meeting PM Khai in Washington and President Tran Duc Luong in Busan.

WTO Accession

14. (SBU) Director Son also expressed hope that the United States will soon conclude WTO accession negotiations with Vietnam. A/S Hill noted that a USTR delegation will be arriving soon for another round of negotiations, but emphasized that the GVN needs to be pragmatic in its approach in these negotiations. He asserted that if negotiations go well and are concluded quickly, then Vietnam will be in a position to accede by the end of the year. Quick accession would be very beneficial to Vietnam's economy, he stressed.

Party Plenum

15. (SBU) A/S Hill asked about the status of preparations for the CPV's Tenth Party Congress this summer. Son noted that the CPV's Central Committee is currently holding its (likely) penultimate plenum meeting before the Congress to finalize draft policy and personnel decisions. The Central Committee plans to push for further "Doi Moi" (renovation) reforms in economic, political and cultural spheres. Son predicted that the CPV will move in a more democratic direction regarding the economy, internal politics and external relations, as it seeks to find "opportunities and conditions to escape Vietnam's under-developed status" and to "contribute to regional stability." The Plenum has come to a consensus within the party on using the "mechanism of the market" and to allow Party members to enter the private sector. The Assistant Secretary complimented Vietnam's practical approach.

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China

16. (SBU) Noting the importance and complexity of U.S.-China and Vietnam-China relations, A/S Hill asked for Son's thoughts on these relationships. Son replied that the Vietnam-China relationship is centuries old and has many historical problems, but has become more positive in recent years due to the GVN's focus on cooperation and friendship. A/S Hill stated that the United States seeks good relations with China and wants Vietnam to have similarly good relations. He added that the USG also maintains a spirit of cooperation and friendship towards its complex, important relationship with China.

Cambodia

17. (SBU) Turning to recent developments in Cambodia, A/S Hill noted his concern that Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen is making mistakes that will be difficult to overcome. Noting that he will meet the Cambodian leader next week, he asked for advice on how to impress on Hun Sen the need to be careful with his decisions. Son observed that this will be "an interesting meeting," especially since Cambodia has only recently overcome many difficulties to maintain stability. Son recently attended Prince Ranariddh's party conference, where many Cambodian leaders emphasized the importance of maintaining stability, peace and development in the country and in the region. A/S Hill observed that what is really needed is implementation of such policies, but recent arrests in Cambodia do not bode well in this regard.

18. (U) Participants:

United States

Assistant Secretary Christopher R. Hill
Ambassador Michael W. Marine
EAP Special Assistant Kamala Lakhdhir
Pol/C Marc Knapper
PolOff Nate Jensen (notetaker)

Vietnam

CPV External Relations Commission Chairman Son
CPV North America/Western Europe Director Pham Tien Nhien
MFA Americas Department Deputy Director Nguyen Ba Hung

19. (U) A/S Hill has cleared this message.

BOARDMAN